



*“Hands  
That  
Care”*

*Richard Cardinal Cushing*



Vietnam  
Wines



*Capping Ceremony*  
*School of Nursing, B.C., January, 1960*

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That  
Care"*

BY

His Eminence  
RICHARD CARDINAL CUSHING



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## *"Hands That Care"*

The Cap you received today, my dear student nurses, symbolizes that you care—that you care for the sick; you care for the body in pain and the soul in anguish. You care for God. I was sick and you visited Me—YOU CARED.

Let me speak to you about that word, "care". The first meaning of the word "care" according to the dictionary is "worry". It also denotes ideas like "concern", "anxiety", "mental suffering" and "grief". Or it can mean a person or a thing that is an object of these, as when we say: "He has become a great **care** to me", or "Our cares have multiplied almost beyond enduring."

So the word "care" seems to carry with it an unpleasant connotation, an association of misfortune. But then we remember other ways in which the word is used, ways that are warm and hu-

man, beautiful ways that console, encourage and strengthen.

Thus, when we leave our loved ones we sometimes say, "Be good, now. Take care of yourself till I come back", by which we seem to say: "Do for yourself the loving, tender, watchful things that I would do for you, if I were here . . . here to **care** for you."

There is nothing more bleak, more heart-breaking than to realize, in the midst of defeat, or disaster, or a great grief or illness, that nobody "**cares**".

The most harsh words in our language are not words like "death" or "disease" or "poverty" or "pain", words which even Stoics can pronounce with dignified composure and which people who love God can pronounce with sweet resignation, even a certain holy peace. But the harshest words, the least lovely and most bitter words are in phrases like "Oh, what difference does it make? Who cares? I don't care. . . . Nobody cares. . . . She no longer cares. . . . They never did care. . . ." These words are the coldest in the language when they are spoken concerning someone afflicted by disease, or broken by poverty, tormented by pain or visited by death.

"Who cares? Not I!" No words are more inhuman than these.

But the word "care" takes on rich, warm, even sublime overtones when we hear it from someone who understands, who sympathizes,



who loves us. We crave for "care", for someone to "care".

"Someone to care for me" cry the aged poor, the bedridden, the sick. "If I only had someone who cared. . . ." Now we are using the word in a sense that is the very opposite of anxiety, concern, or worry. . . . "Care" now implies everything that relieves anxiety, that dispels concern, that eases sorrow and wipes away tears of worry, that soothes pain. "I was filled with cares; worn out with care, weeping away a life of care" . . . this is the silent complaint of many a patient who will look up at you in future years . . . and then I discovered that **someone cared** . . . and all my cares were cast away and life became filled with tender care. . . . You are called to be that "someone".

Study, work and pray. **BECAUSE YOU CARE**. . . . Because you worry about your classes, your exams, yes; because you're anxious to realize your vocation, surely; because you have the concerns of your parents or relatives, of Boston College at heart, certainly; but, above all, because you are moved by the "care" that means "love" for the sick and the dying whom you will serve when your training is finished. Such "care" requires more than a good intention; it means study, sacrifice, solitude in order that you might be well equipped to care for those whose health and very life may at times depend on you alone or on you as part of a medical team.

Everyone wants to be loved. Even people who say they don't . . . indeed, especially people who say they don't . . . for all humans crave to be loved. We all want people to love us. It isn't enough that they **take** care of us; we want them to care **for** us—and these are two totally different concepts. We can be taken care of by a bureaucrat, or a technician, or an impersonal functionary. "Has any one taken care of you?"—this can be the coldest, most casual question in the world, as we hear it in the waiting room of a hospital, a store, anywhere. But to be cared for, that is something else, something very human, not at all cold, or routine, or casual.

Any paid attendant will take care of us so long as the money holds out. But only one who loves us will care for us all the days of our life, and never forget us no matter what befall.

A girl could apply for work or help, for example, and an efficient set-up might process her application, "take care of the case", as the phrase is. But how different is the intense feeling with which the Sacred Scripture describes the devotion of her father. He does more than take care of her. The Scripture says: "The father waketh for his daughter when no man knoweth and the care for her taketh away his sleep. . . ."

Our Blessed Lord made the difference between the hireling and the good shepherd turn on these widely different ideas behind the word "care". The hireling takes care of the flock, but

if trouble should come or an enemy, he makes for his own safety and quits his charges cold, because, says Our Lord, "He is a hireling and he hath no care for the sheep."

Everyone wants to be cared for, to be loved . . . even those upon whom all kinds of care in the cold, efficient sense of the word may actually be showered; but especially those who feel that nobody cares for them, nobody loves them.

There was once a little girl in an orphan asylum. She was a painfully unattractive little girl, homely, awkward, unpleasant in personality. She had irritating ways and secretive, twisted little traits which set her apart from other children and antagonized those who took care of her. She was shunned by the youngsters, disliked by the teachers. That's the kind of ugly duckling she was. The head of the institution longed for a legitimate excuse to get rid of her.

One afternoon it looked as if the chance had come. Another girl, the ugly child's roommate, reported that she was carrying on a forbidden, suspect correspondence with someone outside the grounds. "I've seen her writing notes," the informer said, "and throwing them over the wall at the end of the property. Just a little while ago I saw her hide a note in a tree near the road—and then she ran."

The head of the asylum and her assistant exchanged knowing and gratified glances. They

could scarcely conceal their elation. "We'll soon get to the bottom of this", they said. "Show us where she left the note".

Sure enough. They found the latest note tucked in the branch of a tree overhanging the public highway. The headmistress grabbed it eagerly. She read it—and then she hung her head. She passed it silently to her assistant, and the assistant lowered her head, too.

The note was addressed to no one. It bore no signature. The childish scrawl had simply traced, in letters as ugly as herself, this message: "To whoever finds this: I love you. I hope you care for me!"

Nurses care! You know that there are hundreds, thousands of sick people in this as in every community who long to be loved . . . to be cared for. And so you reach out a helping hand in response to their outreached pleading hand; you give yourself to a profession and a vocation that requires the conquest of self and the perfection of talents according to the spiritual and intellectual courses of the B.C. School of Nursing.

I pray you shall always care for the sick no matter where or how you will be employed when you finish your training. In doing so your hands shall become the Hands of Christ. Hands! What great things we can do with them. All the letters we write; the seeds we plant; the pictures we paint; the fires we light; the help we give—so much depends on hands.

Think of hands . . . hands fumbling for the alarm clock of a morning; turning on faucets; reaching for food, passing it to others, opening the morning paper; hands tugging at coats, diving into a tunnel to come out a sleeve; waving good-bye; catching at the handrail of a train or bus; swinging to safety . . . hands.

All the hands you see: old, toughened hands that have held shovels or controlled machines; long, slender hands that flash up and down a keyboard; warm, hopeful hands that sew bandages or pack gifts; steady, steely hands that pull triggers; tortured hands that clench in pain; tired hands, clasping bundles or empty lunch boxes in the evening on the way home; how much of life's story is told by hands. . . .

And how different is the beauty of hands . . . the hand of a baby, closing unsuspectingly, with utter trust, on anything you place within its grasp; the hand of a boy, tireless, unpredictable, beginning to be useful and a little mischievous; curling around marbles or the handle of a bat; clutching a hard ball or wielding a hockey stick; pointing out a bar of candy in a store; tinkering with a bicycle or the insides of a clock; teasing a pet; quietly lifting the lid off a cookie jar; hands covered with grime and grease and ink . . . and jam . . . a boy's hands.

The hands of a girl . . . made to do lovely things, to fix broken things, to smooth rough

things . . . to pick up things instead of throwing them around; to put things together, instead of tearing them apart; hands made to wear rings . . . how much of the loveliness of life depends on hands. . . .

And how different are the work of hands: The hands that draw blueprints; that measure windows and raise walls, paint surfaces and fashion houses. Even more close to each of us, how beloved are the hands that turn houses into homes: the hand of the laborer that leaves finger marks around the light switch in the front hall; the hands of a mother that wash the dishes and iron the clothes; the hands that open doors to guests; hands that are lifted to lips to silence evil things; hands that sort things, store things and save things; hands that tuck things in, and turn down lights, and smooth out the very wrinkles of our souls, that ease the bruises of our hearts. . . . How much of happiness depends on hands!

But what are the most beautiful hands in the world . . . the most useful for life, the most lovely to hold, the most inspiring to see? Are they the deft hands of an artist? Not necessarily. Or the lotioned, perfect hands of a mere physical beauty? Or the strong hands of the athlete? Or the competent hands of a craftsman?

Maybe, but not by reason of their slenderness or strength or skill alone. For the most wonderful hands are hands that caress. Hands that work.



Hands that bless. Hands that give and serve the sick, the sad, the dying. Such hands are like the hands of God Himself, for they always console, comfort, strengthen and serve.

You who aspire to be nurses, and especially you who have received your Caps today, have hands like these . . . for hands that reach out to do God's work are the loveliest hands in town. It has nothing to do with lotions or lines; it's a question of love, of **hands that care!** **THE HANDS OF CHRIST:**—your hands.

The vocation of the nurse depends on such hands. But behind the nurses' hands that care and that give because they care, there must be a **heart**. It is the loving Heart of Christ functioning through your hands. You are His Hands, His Feet—His Nurse—For what you do for the least of His children you do for Him. Those who see you in your uniform and cap see Christ and you see Him in those you serve. I was hungry and you gave Me to eat, thirsty and you gave Me to drink, sick and you cared for Me. That is the hall mark of the Catholic nurse. She cares for, serves with hands, the tools of trained minds, that are the instruments of the Loving Heart of Christ to soothe the afflicted members of His Mystical Body.

Such nurses Boston College School of Nursing has been sending forth for more than a decade into a cold, statistical, materialistic world. Such nurses I pray you shall one day be.

## *Act of Consecration for Nurses*

O most adorable and loving Jesus, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, through which Thine infinite mercy descends each day from heaven to earth, I consecrate myself to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy which Thou hast destined me to accomplish by Thy grace. Give me the light of faith which will make clear the purpose and value of human suffering. Inspire me with Thine own divine life for those to Whom I minister, so that I may never be turned from the path of duty by aversion or other selfish considerations. Dearest Lord, Thy patience was sorely tried as Thou spent Thyself here on earth for those very people who were scandalized in Thy coming. Help me to be patient when my best efforts fall short of success, when my honest cooperation meets with resistance, when my noblest motives are misunderstood, when my work receives neither recognition nor reward. Teach me the surpassing worth of every duty which I accomplish in Thy name. Stand at my side each morning as I offer my prayers, works and sufferings to Thee, to be directed by Thy will to Thine honor and glory.



O Mary, Queen of Angels and Saints and Mother of Perpetual Help, look down upon me from thy heavenly throne and beg for me from Jesus, thy Son, the divine assistance of which I stand in need. As thou didst nurture Him with loving tenderness during the years of His childhood and youth, do thou now intercede for me as I strive to imitate thy motherly devotion and to find His image in those for whom I labor. Health of the sick, bring divine strength to my care of ailing bodies. Hope of the dying, protect and sanctify those to whom I minister at the hour of death. Help me to be gentle and cheerful, kindly and compassionate, pure and holy. Never let me be false to the teaching of my holy faith, nor lacking in devotion to the ideals of my profession. Let my dedication to my work be complete and without reserve, and let me find my greatest happiness in following with thee the paths of divine charity that lead to eternal life.

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I give myself entirely to Thee. My work is Thy work; Thy work is mine. Thou hast given me Mary for my Mother. Thou hast pledged unto her fulfillment of her every desire. Never has it been known that anyone who sought her help was left unaided, for she is Thy Mother, too, and Thou art her Son. I place my sacred

calling through her in Thy hands. I dedicate myself to it through her, for love of Thee. Jesus, my Love, my All, have mercy on me, and on all who look through me to Thee for relief of pain and suffering. Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, heavenly patron of nurses, pray now and always for me and for all who have recourse to thee. Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on me. Mary, conceived without sin, pray for me.





